

PEOPLE & THINGS: *By ATTICUS*

ON the eve of Leo Amery's death I was, by a coincidence, or maybe premonition, discussing him with a group of his friends. One of us called him "intellectually the most brilliant of his generation in politics": what about "F.E." and John Simon, his exact contemporaries, asked another. While he could not match the glitter and genius of the first Lord Birkenhead, we agreed, he certainly excelled Lord Simon in the range and bite of his abilities.

This mental brilliance he kept, to an astonishing degree, in old age. His "Thoughts on the Constitution," written in his seventies, is an original and provocative contribution to political thought; his autobiography, one volume of which is still to come, shows unflagging power as well as remarkable detachment towards his own achievements and disappointments.

Pugnacity

WHY, then, did he never quite reach the top rank as a statesman? In his pugnacity, no doubt, lies part of the answer. I remember him discoursing, one Sunday, in a private circle at All Souls, with convincing balance and moderation upon the fiscal and economic issues of the hour: whereas a couple of days later, hearing him speak in public on the same topics, I found myself reacting sharply against the extremity of his opinion.

Early and subconscious effort

to overcome his short stature may have been a partial cause. But his whole temperament was against the tactful muffling that gains so many politicians a reputation for safe wisdom. He was a man; and he faced sorrows and failures with a fortitude and a generosity of spirit that won him affection and admiration far beyond those who agreed with his politics.

Disturbing Shortfall

IT has always been an axiom of English public life that the Administrative Class of the Home Civil Service is able to draw, year after year, upon the élite of the younger university graduates.

It would appear from this year's figures that this may no longer be the case. Not only was there an abrupt falling-off in the number of graduates who presented themselves (474, as against 651 in 1953 and 655 in 1954) but the Commissioners declared themselves able to fill only thirty-one of the fifty or so vacancies.

Several explanations have been suggested to me. It is true, for instance, that most of this year's candidates were born in the early 1930s—a period at which the birth-rate was low in general, and especially low in the professional classes from which a large part of the Civil Service is recruited.

Within the Service itself I find that two chief reasons are advanced: that salary-rates have by no means kept pace with the increased cost of living, and that there are now several very large corporations which offer the young graduate security-terms quite comparable to those of the Civil Service, combined with a higher initial salary, the prospect of rapid

promotion in cases of exceptional ability, and a number of auxiliary advantages.

No doubt the Royal Commission on the Civil Service has in mind the implications of a tendency which, if not brought under control, will imperil one of the most valuable traditions in English life.

A Typical Kindness

BEFORE he left for his holiday in the south of France, Sir Winston Churchill sent to all the members of his former personal staff at No. 10, Downing Street, what he described as "a little souvenir" of their association.

This took the form of an unusual gift in silver designed by Sir Winston himself and made by Cartier's. As my

illustration shows, the main feature is his famous V-sign, set off in a circle, and engraved with "Winston Churchill" on one leg and the dates of his peace-time Premiership "1951-1955" on the other.

No one who served Sir Winston at No. 10, from the Ministry of Works carpenter and cleaner to the most responsible adviser on State matters, was forgotten. The souvenir was accompanied by a personal little note from Sir Winston.

Members of the official staff are wondering how best to wear their "little souvenir." The ladies pre-

fer to have it set as a pendant or brooch; some of the men decide to wear it at the head of a tie-pin, others to have it on their watch chains. It is, in any case, the most exclusive decoration in Whitehall.

Distinguished Decade

IT is at this point in the season that one of England's most agile lawn-tennis players, Mr. Benjamin Britten, usually reaches the peak of his form. As one who has bumbled on the base-line while Mr. Britten, at the net, has leaped and darted like an electric eel, I know how great a sacrifice he has made in the cause of the English Opera Group's London season, which opens on Tuesday at the Scala Theatre.

The English Opera Group rarely comes to London: "The Turn of the Screw" is better known to audiences in Munich, Florence and Amsterdam than to ourselves. Even Llangollen, where 8,000 people have heard it in broad daylight in a tent, could be said to be as well favoured.

When the Group was formed in 1946, many people thought that it, and indeed Mr. Britten himself, were ephemeral fashions. Time has proved otherwise; and not only has the Group endeared itself even to the most irritable of the German and Italian critics, but its creations have won wide favour elsewhere. ("Let's Make An Opera!", for instance, has had more than forty professional productions in foreign countries.) This London season (the first, by the way, that has been undertaken by the Group under its own management) commemorates a decade of effort that has been envied but not surpassed.

